

N^o 14

[REDACTED]

Dr. BARTON's

SERMON

Preached before the

House of Commons,

On *January* the 9th, 1739.

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Lunæ 14^o Die Januarii, 1739.

ORdered, That the Thanks of this House be given to the Reverend Dr. *Barton*, for the Sermon by him preached before this House at St. *Margaret's Westminster* on *Wednesday* last, being the Day appointed for a General Fast; and that he be desired to print the Same; and that Mr. *Sandys*, Mr. *Thompson* of *York*, and Mr. *Penton* do acquaint him therewith.

N. HARDINGE,
Cler. Dom. Com.

The Nature and Advantages of a Religious FAST.

A
S E R M O N

Preached before the Honourable

House of Commons,

At St. Margaret's Church *Westminster*,

On *Wednesday*, JANUARY 9. 1739.

Being the Day appointed by HIS MAJESTY'S
Royal Proclamation for a General FAST.

By PHILIP BARTON, LL. D.
Canon of *Christ-Church, Oxon*, and Fellow of the
College near *Winchester*.

L O N D O N:

Printed for J. PEMBERTON, at the *Golden Buck*
against St. *Dunstan's Church* in *Fleetstreet*. 1739.



2 CHRON. XX. 3.

And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a Fast throughout all Judah.

IN this and the preceding Chapters we have the History of the Reign of the good *Jehoshaphat*.-- He is described as a wise and religious Prince, who followed the commandments of the Lord, and walked in all the ways of David his father. We are told, that he sent Princes and Levites to be Teachers of the Law; and appointed Judges in the Land, and in the fenced Cities. And he waxed great exceedingly; for he had Captains of thousands, and mighty Men of Valour in Judah and Jerusalem. And the Fear of the Lord fell upon all the Kingdoms, which were round about him; and they made no War upon Jehoshaphat, but sent him Presents of Silver, and paid him Tribute of their Flocks and Herds. In short, the Lord established the Kingdom in his Hand, and he had Riches and Honour in great abundance.

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In this happy Situation, and in the midst of a profound Peace, he was all on a sudden alarmed by a powerful Invasion. He received Intelligence of the March of a numerous Army; that *a great multitude was coming from beyond the sea, and that the children of Moab and Ammon were confederate against him.*—Agreeably to his natural Temper, and the Devotion of Heart, he immediately makes his Addresses to the *God of Heaven.* There he knew was his Dependance, his only Help and Deliverance in the Time of Need. And therefore *there he makes his devout and earnest Application, and humbly offers up his Prayers to the Throne of Grace.* And that there might be a greater Decency and Solemnity in this publick Act of Religion, he begins with proclaiming a Fast throughout all the Land of *Judah.*—*And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a Fast throughout all Judah.*

This was the devout Behaviour of *Jehoshaphat King of Judah*; and from this instructive History I shall beg leave, in the *First Place*, to shew the Nature and Advantages of a Religious Fast.

And then, *Secondly*, I shall make some Observations, suitable to the Occasion of this Day's Solemnity.

First

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First then, I am to shew the Nature and Advantages of a Religious Fast.

It would carry us back into very remote Antiquity, if we were to trace the Original of this important Duty. It has been the Practice of all Ages, and of all Countries; and is agreeable to the very Constitution of human Nature.—We know how frequently it is celebrated in the Prophetick Writings, and with what Exactness it was commanded by the Law of *Moses*.—Our Blessed Saviour was pleased to give us an eminent Example of this Duty. Full forty Days he retired into the Wilderness; where his Employment was Meditation, Fasting and Prayer. And Historians give us a large Account of the primitive Christians; how they fasted and mourned in Silence, and with all the Rigours, and Severities of the penitential Life.

There is a natural Levity and Wantonness in the Mind of Man; such a Levity, as must be restrained and disciplined, before we can hope to make any Improvements in the School of Wisdom. In the present Hurry of the World, amidst the Noise and Tumult of the Passions, we attend not to the *still Voice* of Reason and Religion. So that we want a Season of Recollection and Silence

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to compose our Thoughts, and to give us an happy Frame and Temper of Mind.

It is true, as we are a Composition of Soul and Body, we must attend to the Avocations of Sense, and the importunate Demands of Flesh and Blood. During our Pilgrimage here, we cannot hope for the Perfection of Angels, or expect the Privileges of unembodied Spirits. So that, whilst we are cloathed with Flesh, we must be allowed the necessary Repairs of Nature; we must relieve and unbend the Mind by proper Recreations. But then we are to remember, that we must be sober, exact, and temperate; there must be no Profusion and Excess, no Indulgence beyond the Laws of Reason, and the Commands of the Gospel.

Nay, as we are the Followers of the Blessed *Jesus*, we are obliged to greater Purity of Life, to higher Acts of Devotion in our Christian Warfare. In a State of *Nature* indeed the Appetites govern; but in a State of *Grace* it is Religion which sways the Sceptre. Now we are commanded by this Religion, to subdue our Passions, to retrench our innocent Pleasures, and to make Abatements even in our *allowed* Enjoyments. There is a great Variety of Reasons for this, and the Affair of Religion cannot possibly succeed, unless

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less we restrain the Tendency of our corrupt Desires.

The Duties of Contrition, Prayer, and Repentance are important Duties; but these can never rationally be performed, whilst the Body is unsubdued. Again, we have many Sins to confess; many Failings to lament; many Temptations to resist; many Graces to implore for ourselves and Families; all of them Employments of a spiritual Nature, and which require the Assistances of Mortification and Self-Denial. So that to hold the Reins of our Passions, to subdue and mortify our Inclinations, to bring the Body into Subjection, and to prepare it for the Recollection and Discipline of the Spirit, to exercise an holy Revenge upon ourselves, and to bid adieu to every Instance of Luxury and Self-Enjoyment; this is the proper Labour and Employment of the christian Life.

'Tis in vain to talk of the Doctrines of the Cross, when we are devoted to Sense and Pleasure; or to think of Religious Severities, when we are surfeited with Ease and Plenty; when perhaps *we are stretch'd upon our Beds of Ivory*, or rise from the Delicacies of a luxurious Table. But when we are cool, composed and deliberate; when the Passions are subdued, and the Body mortified; *then* we may with Boldness make known our
Wants,

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Wants, and offer up the *Incense* of our Prayers before the *Mercy-Seat*. 'Tis *then* we shall be qualified for these refined Employments; the Memory will be faithful, the Imagination quick and delicate; all the Faculties of the Mind will be in their proper Order, and fit to appear in the Presence of the God of Purity.

So that upon whatever Occasion we are to make our Addresses to God; whether we are to implore his Mercies, or deprecate his Judgments; whether we are to supplicate for private or publick Blessings; whether we are to intercede for ourselves, our Friends, or our *Country*; we can never be better prepared than by Religious Abstinence.

The Men of *Nineveh* were sensible of this; and therefore at the preaching of *Jonah* they proclaimed a Fast. And they put on sackcloth from the greatest even to the least. And the king of *Nineveh* arose from his throne, and laid aside his royal robes, and put on sackcloth, and sate in ashes. This was the *Eastern* Manner of expressing their Concern, and declaring the inward Sorrow and Contrition of the Heart.

We are commanded indeed *not to be of a sad countenance; but to anoint our head, and wash our face; that we may not appear unto men to fast.* The
Meaning

Meaning of which is, that we are not *to sound the trumpet*, or proclaim our Virtues; that our Devotions must be sincere and uniform, without Affectation, without Hypocrisy. But still such real Severities are supposed, as tend to regulate and compose the Mind, and to qualify us for the Offices of Devotion and Contemplation.

Many are the Blessings which attend this Duty, if we consider it in a *private* View; if we only suppose a Man withdrawing from the World, and enjoying the Retirement of his Closet. But the Advantages are still greater, when Multitudes are concerned, and when Thousands are offering up their Prayers upon the same Occasion. If there be a Solemnity in *publick* Prayer, there is likewise a proportionable Solemnity in *publick* Humiliation. And we can hardly imagine a more venerable Appearance, than when a whole Nation is prostrate before the Throne of Grace, and offering up their Supplications with Prayer and Fasting.

When *Jehoshaphat* proclaimed his Fast, we read *that all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and children.* Doubtless such united Prayers and Praises are extremely acceptable to God, and will have a mighty Efficacy to avert the Judgments of Heaven. Such a National Worship

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ship as this *will enter into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth*. It gives us *great Ideas of Religion*, when we see a whole Kingdom compos'd and serious; when there is a general Gravity and Silence; no Exchange and Commerce in our Places of Trade, no Confusion and Hurry in our Streets.

Such we have Reason to hope is the solemn Humiliation of *this Day*; when we are called upon to intercede for *ourselves*, and *our Country*. As the Duty is highly rational, so the Occasion is of the utmost Importance. And it ought to give Life and Spirit to our Devotions, when they have the Sanction of publick Authority; when they are commanded by the *Throne*, and recommended by the Example of this *Great Assembly*.

Which brings me, in the *Second Place*, to make some Observations suitable to the Occasion of this Day's Solemnity.

WAR is one of those *Arrows in the Hand of the Almighty*, which are sent abroad into the World for the wisest Reasons. Like the other Calamities of Life, it executes the Decrees of his unerring Wisdom.—It might perhaps be enough to say, that thus is the Will of Heaven; and that the Supreme Disposer of all Things has thus ordained it. The sovereign Dominion is *his*, and therefore he does
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in the Armies of Heaven, and amongst the Inhabitants of the Earth, whatever he pleases. However, we may with all Humility observe, that the Proceedings of God are never arbitrary; and his Power (Almighty as it is) is always under the Direction and Influence of his Goodness.—Though the Sons of Men may be apt to complain; yet their Calamities are never undeserved, never unprovoked. They make a Part of the Scheme of Providence, and are to be considered as the Chastisements of our heavenly Father. When Vice, when Wickedness prevails, it is then *the right-aiming Thunderbolts go abroad*, and we are to be punished with *Desolation, Famine and the Sword*.

It is impossible for a *Wise Man* not to see these Truths, and for a *Good Man* not to be affected by them.—And the Use of such Meditations is, to take a View of our moral Conduct, and to recollect the Miscarriages of our past Lives; to enquire by what Provocations we have lost the Favour of Heaven, and why after a long Enjoyment of Peace, we are plunged into all the Misery and Desolation of *War*.

Now we ought with Shame to confess, that it is for our Sins and Iniquities *the Land mourns*.—Our *Sins* are the real Cause of our Misfortunes; Our *Enemies* are only the Ministers of Vengeance

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in the Hands of Providence.—— We have evidently lost the Sobriety and Seriousness of our Forefathers, and are sunk into a delicate Effeminacy, and Love of Pleasure. This has introduced a general Decay of Piety, and a Contempt of all the Offices of our holy Religion.—— So that Infidelity has at last erected its Standard, and *bids defiance to the armies of the living God.*—— In short, if the Neglect of publick Worship, of Prayer and Sacraments; if the Increase of Pride and Luxury, of Cruelty and Revenge; if the Want of Modesty, Temperance and Chastity; if a daily Profusion of Wantonness, Extravagance, and Excess; if these be Symptoms of Disorder; sure I am we are in a very sad and languishing Condition!

One would imagine, that Liberty should be attended with the happiest Effects. — *Liberty*, which is the Source of every Pleasure, the Fountain and Foundation of every Blessing. Like Health to the Body natural, it recommends and sweetens every other Enjoyment. And yet this *venerable* Name has been perverted and abused; under the specious Pretence of Liberty, such Indecencies have been committed, and such Impieties have been published, as are really a Dishonour to the Christian Name.

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It is an high Aggravation of our Guilt, that we sin presumptuously; surrounded with Mercies, and possessed of all the National Blessings, that can be imagined.—We forget the glorious Light of the Gospel, which shines around us; so often preserved, and so happily reformed amongst us. We forget our many and signal Deliverances; the long Enjoyment of our Religious and Civil Liberties; and all the happy Advantages of our admired and envied Constitution. In the midst of Security, Ease, and Plenty, *our iniquities are increased over our heads, and our trespasses are grown up to the very heavens.— Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity! we are a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters; we have forsaken the Lord, we have provoked the holy one of Israel!*

It is a disagreeable and unpleasing Task to dwell upon this Subject, and to recount the Mis-carriages of our Age, and Country.—But we *must* be faithful in the Discharge of our Duty; we *dare* not draw a Veil over our publick Wickedness. Such an affected Silence would be criminal, and would ill become the Solemnity of *this Day*, and *this holy Place*. — On the contrary, we ought to confess and lament our Sins, to display them in their full Force, with all their Number, and all their Aggravations; to acknowledge with Shame and

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Confusion that we have provoked the Almighty; to cry mightily unto the Lord, and to turn to him with weeping, fasting, and mourning.—This is agreeable to the Nature and Reason of Things; to the very Design of a Religious Fast; and to the holy Offices of Devotion, which we have just performed.

Such we find are the Directions of Solomon in that magnificent Prayer at the Dedication of the Temple.— If thy people go out to war against the enemy, or the enemy besiege them in their fenced cities. If thy people sin against thee, and thou be angry with them, so that they be carried away captive into the enemies land.— Yet if they repent and return to thee, with all their heart, and with all their soul; if they make their prayer and supplication towards the city, which thou hast chosen, and towards the house, which I have built for thy great name, — Then bear thou them from heaven, thy dwelling place; and when thou hearest, forgive thy people their transgressions, and maintain their Cause.

Such again was the Conduct of Jehoshaphat, when he stood in the Congregation of Judah, when he bowed his head with his face to the ground, and when all the inhabitants of Jerusalem worshipped before the Lord. — And we hope, that Our Prayers and Praises will be attended with the same Success.

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For immediately after, we read the Defeat of the confederate Armies; and we are told that *Jehoshaphat* returned to *Jerusalem* in great Triumph, with the Sound of *Psalteries, Harps, and Trumpets*, and with all imaginable Demonstrations of Joy and Thanksgiving.

HAPPY indeed shou'd we be, if we could as easily defend ourselves, as we can the Justice of the Cause, wherein we are engaged.—For we have taken up Arms with no unwarrantable Views; not to gratify our Pride, or indulge our Ambition; not to enlarge our Empire, or extend our Dominions; not to enrich ourselves with the Spoils of Cruelty, or the Gains of Oppression. *Our* Preparations are intended for other Purposes; to relieve the Injured, and vindicate the Oppressed; to assert our Privileges, and secure our Property; to maintain the Honour of the Crown, and to protect the Liberties of the People; to make amends for the Interruption of our Trade, and the Plunder of our Fellow-Subjects. —*These* are Motives of Honour, Reason, and Religion; such as arise from the Principles of Self-defence, from the just Resentments of a provoked and injured Nation.

Never indeed were greater Injuries received; in Defiance of all Truth, and in Violation of all Engage-

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gagements. And yet our Resolutions were cool and deliberate; such as are agreeable to Moderation and a Christian Temper. Wearied at last with Indignities, and resolved to exert the natural *Genius* of our Country, we have now referr'd our Cause to the Decision of the Sword. This is a solemn Appeal to the *God of Heaven*; that God, *who sitteth between the Cherubims, and who ruleth over all the Kingdoms of the Earth.* His Assistance, his Protection and Blessing we now implore; and we intercede (as *Ezra* did) *for ourselves, our little ones, and all our Substance.*

There *was* a Time (and we read the *History* with Pleasure) when we enjoyed the Favour of Heaven upon a like Occasion. We had the *same* imperious and haughty Enemy, the *same* Disturbers of our Repose and Quiet. — Secure of Conquest they came; for their Preparations of War were called *Invincible.* And they intended nothing less than our final Ruin, the utter Destruction of our Religion, Laws, and Liberties. — Yet even *then*, in this Day of Difficulty and Distress, did *God arise*; *He scattered our Enemies, and they fled before him.* *He that is higher than the Highest maintained our Cause*: He was pleased to send out his mighty Voice: *He commanded the Winds and the Seas, and they obeyed him.*

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With the *same* Humility of Mind, we offer up our Prayers for the *same* Assistance; and it is with a devout and pious Confidence we hope for the *same* Success. We doubt not indeed the Protection of Heaven in *such* a Cause; a Cause, so absolutely just and necessary, so agreeable to the united Voice of the People, with so much Zeal supported by the *Throne*, and by the Unanimity and Wisdom of a *British Parliament*.

I have said *Unanimity*; which has eminently appeared at the present Juncture.—And from this Situation of Affairs, we please ourselves with an agreeable and delightful Prospect. We hope that a Spirit of *Union* and *Moderation* will diffuse itself through all Orders of Men; and that there will be no other Contention, but who shall express the heartiest Concern for our *Laws* and *Religion*, the greatest Zeal for the Honour of *our Sovereign*, and for the Defence of *our happy Establishment*.

We ought indeed to second and support His ROYAL Cares.—And whilst our Fleets and Armies are engaged abroad, surrounded with Dangers, and distracted with all the Hurry and Confusion of *War*; We ought to employ our Security and Retirement to the Purposes of *Religion*. We ought without ceasing to implore the Divine Assistance,

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sistance, and beg the Protection of Heaven in all our Undertakings; that Success may attend our Arms, and the Spirit of Wisdom descend upon our Counsels. — This is the proper Way of celebrating *this Religious Fast*, and will give Evidence to the World, that we are *a wise and understanding People*. — So that where-ever we carry our Arms, our Trade, and our Commerce; where-ever the *British Name*, or Language, extends; *there* we may be famed for our *Religion*, our *Moderation* and *Justice*; for our *Zeal* for the Cause of *Liberty*; for *Loyalty* to our *Prince*, and *Love* to our *Country*.

Let us, therefore, go forth in the name of the *Lord of Hosts*, conducted by his Wisdom, and supported by his Power. — Let us, like *Jehoshaphat*, engage Heaven on our Side; and then we need not *fear and be dismayed*, though our Enemies should be mighty and numerous, though *a multitude should come from beyond the sea*, and tho' *the children of Moab and Ammon should be confederate against us*.

Amidst our other *Victories* let us be sure not to forget THE CONQUEST OF OURSELVES. This is *absolutely* in our own Power; depends not upon
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Chance or Fortune, but upon the Stability and Integrity of our own Hearts.

Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and gracious unto his inheritance. Then will our Days of Fasting and Mourning be turned into Feasts of Joy and Triumph. Then after the Fatigues of a successful War, we may rationally hope for a safe, an honourable, and a lasting Peace; and that we shall entail these Blessings upon our King, our Country, and our latest Posterity.

Now to G O D the *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,*
be all Honour, Thanksgiving, and Glory,
World without End. *Amen.*

F I N I S.



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